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ABSTRACT

This document is the ninth in a series of 12 early childhood program descriptions compiled by the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development. The program described here is the Early Childhood Education Learning System which was developed at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in Austin, Texas. The Early Childhood Education Learning System includes a 3-year sequential program for children ages 3-5, a 2-year sequential program for children ages 4-5, and a 1-year program for 5-year-olds who have not attended preschool before. The program has two components: one for low-income urban and rural black children, and the other for low-income urban and migrant Mexican-Americans. The Mexican-American component features bilingual teaching methods. The goal of the program is to alleviate the difficulties low-income children usually meet in school by stressing the development of verbal and reasoning skills and a healthy self-concept. Teachers are provided with explicit instructions for presenting lessons and the specific tasks for children are described in detail. Included in the program description are brief outlines of: (1) goals and objectives, (2) content and materials, (3) classroom activities, (4) parent involvement, (5) professional and paraprofessional training, (6) administrative requirements and costs, (7) program development and evaluation, and (8) program history and present (1971) status. (JMB)

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Early Childhood
Information Unit
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Program Summary

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION LEARNING SYSTEM

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GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

The Early Childhood Education Learning System includes a three-year sequential program for children ages 3-5, a two-year sequential program for ages 4-5, and a one-year program for 5-year-olds who have not attended preschool before. The program is currently under development at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in Austin, Texas. The program has two components: one for low-income urban and rural black children, the other for low-income urban and migrant Mexican-Americans.

The goal of the program is to alleviate the difficulties low-income children usually meet in school. The program development staff believes that many such children never receive the full benefits of public education because the school does not build on their strengths. The staff hopes that its program will help children to "acquire the educational experiences and the verbal and social skills necessary to prepare them for formal education."

CONTENT AND MATERIALS:

The program for black children and its bilingual counterpart for Mexican-Americans stress verbal and reasoning skills and healthy self-concepts. Both provide training in visual and auditory skills, motor skills, English, and problem solving and reasoning skills. With visual training, the child is expected to progress from "sensation" through "perception" to "conceptualization." Eye-hand coordination and perceiving one's position in space are typical topics. Activities in "auditory location" and "perception of rhythm" are typical of auditory training. Motor skills development stresses body awareness and visual coordination.

The purpose of the language activities is to develop linguistic competence. Lessons to develop vocabulary and control of sentence structure are presented in a prescribed sequence. The teacher is provided with explicit instructions for presenting language concepts, and the specific tasks for children are described in detail.

In the bilingual component for Mexican-American children, all activities are presented first in Spanish. When the children demonstrate mastery of concepts in their native language, the same concepts are presented in English, their second language. The program includes activities intended to train the children to understand and produce simple language forms in their native language and in English. The developers believe that these activities should lead children to describe, narrate, and generalize their own and others' actions.

For each training area in both components there are planned learning activities, sequenced from simple to

more complex tasks. Each lesson prescription contains a clearly stated behavioral objective, a description of the materials needed to teach the lesson, and an outlined procedure designed to help the child reach the desired objective.

The program provides the teacher with a package which contains a curriculum guide, pictures, puzzles, transparencies, audiovideo tapes, and all of the manipulative materials children need for the prescribed activities. From her supply the teacher selects student materials for specific purposes.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:

The major teaching strategy employed by the program is "role modeling," which has been adapted from the theories of Jerome Kagan. Role modeling is based on the belief that children want to be like adults and that the behavior of the teacher is an important motivating force in the classroom. The program staff sees the entire classroom environment as dependent on the teacher. In serving as a "model," they state that the teacher should exhibit "enthusiasm, buoyancy, commitment to learning, a can-do attitude, affection, warmth, concern (without sentimental overtones), fairness, and flexibility."

The staff recommends a class of 18-25 children to one teacher and one assistant teacher. The children should be divided into three or four groups which alternate direct instruction and independent study. The staff suggests that the room be arranged with "learning areas"; for example, a language skills area and a large-group activity area.

The following description of a lesson in auditory training will demonstrate a typical learning activity. This lesson is called "Follow the Sound." The behavioral objective is stated in these terms: "Upon hearing the sound of the drum and told by the teacher 'walk to the sound of the drum,' the blind-folded child will walk to the sound." The participating children sit on the floor in a circle. The teacher explains and demonstrates the procedure: one child is to be blindfolded and one child is to hit the drum. The teacher checks to see that no obstructions are in the way and then the children begin the lesson.

A continual testing process enables the teacher to gear the learning activities to the needs of the children. Before each new skill area is introduced, a pretest is given and the results diagnosed. After instruction a posttest is given to determine what the child learned. If the lesson objectives are met, the child proceeds to independent study or a new activity. If he demonstrates difficulty, he is reinstructed. Unit tests and mastery tests (covering units) are also administered. All tests are provided by the program.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT:

The parent-community component is designed to "involve parents in the education of their children through the development of a working partnership between the school and the parents." There are educational materials for parents to use with their children. These materials are designed to reinforce and extend concepts introduced in the classroom. The staff has also developed assessment techniques to measure parent participation and teaching effectiveness.

PROFESSIONAL AND PARAPROFESSIONAL TRAINING:

The project has a model for training personnel to implement the programs under development. This model is being pilot tested. Schools involved in the pilot testing are provided with summer workshops, consultant services, and audiovisual training materials.

A training model for paraprofessional aides or teaching assistants is also being developed. A text, "Handbook for Paraprofessionals in Migrant Education," is undergoing pilot testing.

ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS AND COSTS:

No specific facilities or equipment are needed to implement the program. The only equipment required are state-recommended traditional early childhood materials. There is a list of suggested supplemental equipment to use for reinforcement purposes. All other materials are supplied by the program.

Currently the program is available to local school districts and educational centers for pilot testing and field testing. The approximate cost for one level of the program (e.g. Level I, Bilingual 3-year-olds) is $1,100.00 per classroom. This cost includes training materials, consultants' fees, and instructional materials. It does not include the teachers' salaries, aides' salaries, or classroom furniture and supplies.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION:

The Early Childhood Learning System staff has identified a growing body of research data indicating that children who go through preschool are better prepared for formal schooling at age six than those who have not been in preschool. The staff also cites the findings of Elizabeth Peal and Wallace Lambert (1962), who state that the earlier a child is exposed to a second language the easier it is to master. Among the other theorists who influenced the design of the program are Jerome Bruner, Carl Bereiter, and Marion Blank.

The Early Childhood Learning System has been through three years of design and data evaluation with four populations: urban Mexican-American (three sites), migrant Mexican-American (two sites), rural black (one site), and urban black (one site). The program has been pilot tested with the above populations in San Antonio, McAllen, Galveston, Edinburg, Dallas, and Fort Worth, Texas, and Bossier and Caddo Parishes in Louisiana, and Somerton, Arizona.

According to the developers, the program has undergone a detailed evaluation process which includes teacher checklists, oral conferences, and observations in addition to the pupil performance data obtained by testing. The developers state that results from the San Antonio site have demonstrated gains in the intellectual performance level of the experimental groups.

PROGRAM HISTORY AND PRESENT STATUS:

The Early Childhood program was initiated in the spring of 1967 when, in determining its overall focus, the Southwest Educational Laboratory decided to develop a preschool program in addition to programs for grades K-6. It was felt that "special needs of various cultural groups could be met more effectively by beginning [training] earlier." At that time there was also growing public awareness of the need for early childhood education and this also influenced the Laboratory's decision. Operational classes were set up in three educational development centers located in San Antonio, Texas (for urban Mexican-Americans), McAllen, Texas (for migrant Americans), and Fort Worth, Texas (for urban Mexican-American and black children). A fourth center was located in Conway, Arkansas to develop staff training materials. This center, the Southwest Center for Early Childhood Personnel Development, is a cooperative effort of the Laboratory and the State College of Arkansas.

Each center (or school) implementing the program must manage and supervise the classes. Laboratory personnel serve as consultants in organizing the program. A central staff in Austin coordinates all schools using the system.

At the present time the four alternative programs (for urban blacks, rural blacks, urban Mexican-Americans, and migrant Mexican-Americans) are still undergoing design, testing and revision as the results of the pilot schools are analyzed. The sequential bilingual program for three- and four-year-olds will be ready for general dissemination by September 1972. No date has been set for the dissemination of the other programs as of November 1971.